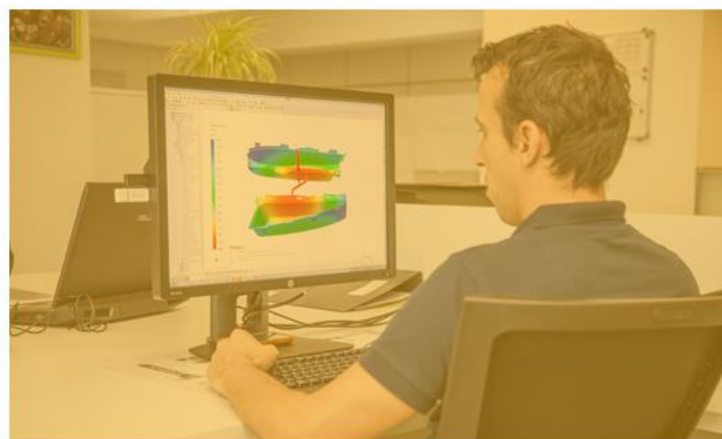
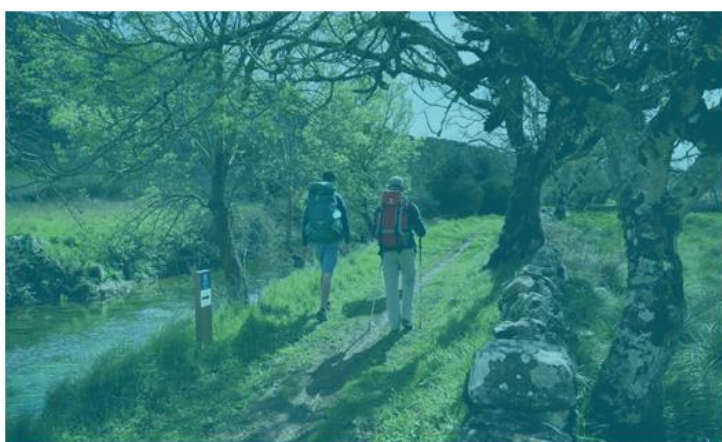


Mid-term Evaluation of the Regional Operational Programme for the Centre 2014–2020

Final Report

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Cofinanciado por:



Developed by:



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1. Object, scope, and evaluation objectives

The main objective of the Mid-term Evaluation of the Regional Operational Programme for the Centro 2014-2020 was to "identify and explain the Operational Programme (OP) contribution to the expected results in the SO of each Investment Priority (IP) mobilised in each of its Priority Axes", which included: (i) assessing the degree of effectiveness and efficiency of the support granted by the OP, identifying its contribution (cause-effect relationship) to the SO pursued in each IP and taking into account the moment when the evaluation is carried out; (ii) Identifying the potential or actual impact of the implementation of the OP and its alignment with the Union's strategic objectives for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and for the economic, social and territorial cohesion of the Centro Region; (iii) identify the European Added Value associated with the implementation and results of the OP; (iv) assess the relevance and coherence of the configuration of the OP in relation to the needs of its primary beneficiaries and the evolution of the context throughout the programming period, taking into account the effectiveness, efficiency and potential impact revealed by the OP.

The OP Centro 2020

The Regional Operational Programme for the Centro 2014-2020 is the main financial instrument available to the Region for the implementation of the Regional Development Strategy for the period 2014-2020 of the Regional Policy of the European Union (EU), being complemented by other financial instruments that are part of Portugal 2020.

The main objectives of the OP are to promote the economic, social, and territorial development of the Central Region of Portugal using the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF). Among the objectives of the Programme, we highlight the increase of competitiveness and internationalisation of the Region's economy, the promotion of territorial cohesion and the improvement of the living conditions of the population through the support of projects in the areas of education, training, research, innovation, entrepreneurship, environment and sustainability. The Programme also aims to promote social inclusion, fight poverty and discrimination, and strengthen the institutional and administrative capacity of regional and local entities, in line with the strategic objectives of the European Union for the period 2014-2020.

The state of play on 31st December 2021

Until the evaluation cut-off date, 31st of December 2021, the POR Centro received 22,974 applications. Of the applications with a final decision, 9,661 operations were approved.

Axes 8 and 10 stood out for having approval rates above 85%. However, these two axes accounted for only 126 of the 9,661 projects approved. The two axes with the highest volume of approved projects - Axis 2 (with 3,672 approved applications) and Axis 4 (with 2,256 approved applications) - had approval rates of 40.2% and 39.1%, respectively. Despite these slightly below-average approval rates, they had high commitment rates: Axis 2 at 130.6% and Axis 4 at 101.4%. Of the five axes with the lower approval rates (1, 2, 4, 5 and 6), Axes 1 and 5 also have commitment rates above the Programme average, which indicates that the incidence of failures did not hinder the achievement of the targets and dedicated amounts.

Axis 2 had the highest approved community funding (848 M€), exclusively ERDF. This axis had as its most essential intervention typologies those related to the internationalisation of SMEs and the qualification and innovation of SMEs.

The levels of commitment and achievement (112% and 55%, respectively) recorded in the Centro 2020 Operational Programme at the time of the assessment align with the other Operational Programmes of the Mainland, although below what is expected for this phase of the programming period.

2. Methodology

The evaluation used the Theory-Based Evaluation (TBA) method as a reference and involved structuring the logical framework of the OP Centro 2020 intervention and the respective Theory of Change (ToC). The evaluation process involved various methods and techniques for collecting and analysing information, including documentary and statistical data analysis, nine interviews/meetings, four case studies, four *focus groups*, and two surveys (one for business promoters and one for non-business entities).

A literature review and desk review process further supported the development of the ToM. It considered concerning assumptions and risks, a focus on the evaluation criteria governing the evaluation questions posed in the Terms of Reference and, therefore, a focus on outcomes rather than on operationalising the typologies.

The methodological approach was based on diverse methods and techniques, selected according to the in-depth options provided by the Terms of Reference. This defined different possibilities for deepening the evaluation according to the Intervention Types (IT). In the case of specific objectives covered by other thematic evaluations already carried out under Portugal 2020 (options 1.1. and 1.2), this evaluation based on the results of those evaluations and uses simple information collection techniques. For the specific objectives not covered by these evaluations, a lower level of scrutiny (focused only on the analysis of effectiveness and efficiency) was assumed for the IT covered by option 2.1 and, on the contrary, a greater depth - mobilising all methods of information collection and analysis and the mobilisation of TBA - for the IT covered by option 2.2. In this context, the present evaluation assumes a greater depth of the IT subject to this option, namely: PI: 8.5 (axis 4); PI 4.5 (axis six and axis 9); PI 6.5 (axis six and axis 9); and PI 9.8 (axis 9). The Theory-Based Evaluation method was mobilised in these, using the "Theory of Change" and "Contribution Analysis" approaches.

3. Conclusions

Effectiveness

The OP's performance in terms of achievement of realisation targets is positive overall - around 75% of measurable targets show a level of achievement equal to or greater than 80%, although unbalanced between axes, especially highlighting, and negatively, the IPs that support institutional capacity building and some training, urban rehabilitation and energy efficiency actions in regional and local administration, in which the performance of the MA will be essential, either through reprogramming of targets or closer monitoring of implementation.

The main factor that conditioned the OP's pace and implementation capacity was, prominently, the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to disruptions at various levels, from the capacity of MAs to respond simultaneously to ongoing operations and the need to launch support measures in the context of the pandemic, to disruptions in supply chains, with particular relevance in the case of projects involving construction works (increased costs, difficulty in mobilising contractors and delay in the availability of materials). Other factors of a more operational nature and controllable by the Programme appear to have delayed the start-up and implementation of business promoters' projects, such as the deadlines for the analysis of applications and the deadlines for the analysis of payment requests, as well as the reduced predictability of the CAAs.

The OP proved to be particularly effective in education, with very satisfactory levels of financial realisation and with all targets for primary and secondary education infrastructure interventions and in combating school failure generally met or with good prospects of being fulfilled. In this area, interventions in educational infrastructures stand out, as the targets were mainly exceeded, reflecting greater ambition and prioritisation of these investments by municipalities, in particular after extending the scope of jurisdiction of municipalities to secondary schools and also due to interventions for asbestos removal. The measures to combat school failure have also proved effective, having achieved the objectives and targets set for this area, with the intervention in 13 schools under the TEIP programme and the implementation of 8 PIICE in the Region.

Concerning vocational and advanced training, the support instruments showed good adherence by the target beneficiaries, except for support for CET courses, where the emergence of CTESP and their competitive effects on CET led to a shift in demand between these two offers. In the case of CTESP, despite good adherence, the risk of non-completion of the courses due to the integration of trainees in the labour market before completion may jeopardise the achievement of the outcome indicators.

In the field of employment promotion, through micro-entrepreneurship, the measures to support micro-entrepreneurship stand out, where SI2E, +CO3SO and PAPAN have shown excellent adherence. It is expected that the associated targets will be generally met, with only the indicator "People supported in the context of job creation, including self-employment" being marginally below the defined target due to the combined effects of the disruptions caused by the pandemic in the labour market and the non-start of many of the operations. This non-start of operations, specifically in these instruments, will not be unrelated to the high time taken to analyse and decide on applications due to the high number of applications received.

Efficiency

The various forms of support encouraged investment, with the financial support of the ROP Centro 2014-2020 being a fundamental help to the dynamics of regional investment in that period, with a preference for non-reimbursable grants associated with the dominant Community support policy in Portugal throughout the various funding periods. However, the lack of culture on repayable grants is transversal to the generality of PT2020 and not specific to the ROP Centro 2014-2020.

In some areas, the financial allocation of the OP Centro 2020 proves to be insufficient given the needs identified in the Region, some of which constitute structural challenges. In particular, the profound territorial asymmetries that the Region faces stand out, with the inland territories being strongly depopulated and aged, compromising economic and social dynamization and the necessary attraction of Community funds. The growing shortage of human resources, as observed in the country, is still a critical challenge to consider, in addition to the lack of qualified human resources with high levels of specialisation in the Region, particularly in the interior/low-density territories.

The macroeconomic context and the mismatch between the financing modalities affected the ROP Centro 2014-2020 performance and the beneficiaries' implementation capacity, worsening the investment effort and impacting compliance with the maximum reference values (standard costs). The values applied proved to be misaligned from 2019 onwards, given the evolution of the market values of goods and services, particularly in infrastructural interventions (construction, requalification and rehabilitation), which led to a decrease in the co-financing rate implicit in the support concerning the eligible investment executed.

There is a persistence of a certain complexity of the regulatory framework, representing constraints in the operationalisation of support in some situations, which is disproportionate and penalises greater efficiency. In addition, there is an excessive bureaucratic framework, with duplication of some procedures and a reduced monitoring capacity of less capacitated local actors. Nevertheless, improvements in management practices have increased efficiency and reduced transaction costs.

FIs offer more attractive financing conditions than the traditional market, mitigating demand-inhibiting market failures, although some of the constraints presented could be improved.

Impact and Sustainability

The Region's productive specialisation profile remained unchanged, although with subsectoral changes in services, possibly due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on trade. The deepening of smart specialisation supported by a high value-added technological economy is still not evident, with R&D expenditure volumes as a percentage of GDP falling short of the European Strategy 2020 targets.

On education, there was an extremely positive performance in line with the ambition and allocation of resources of the Programme in this area, namely in the improvement of preschool and primary education school facilities, in the modernisation and reinforcement of 1st, 2nd and 3rd cycle establishments, in the promotion of educational success and the support of equal access to education and qualification of teaching and professional learning. There have also been significant advances in access to and improvement of conditions in higher education, impacting the capacity of regional human resources. Between 2014-2021, the Centro Region recorded the second largest evolution in the number of employed population with higher education, at NUTS II level (+55.7%; about 100 thousand more people), converging with the national average.

The Centro Region showed a significant downward trend in unemployment rates, although in line with the national level. The effectiveness of the interventions and the extent of the results already achieved suggest a very relevant contribution of the OP to induce the improvement of the performance of the Region in terms of employability,

The local benefits of integrated urban regeneration interventions had multiple impacts on the qualification of the regional urban system, with a positive demographic dynamic between 2011 and 2021 in the predominantly urban areas of the Region. On the contrary, the evolution of the modal split in commuting movements, with a worsening in the use of individual transport between 2011 and 2021, reveals the difficulty of infrastructural investments in sustainable urban mobility to counteract heavy dynamics facilitated by the fragmentation of urban space.

European Value Added

The ESIF allowed a substantial part of the investment and results achieved by the supported projects. This additionality effect of the OP was very relevant for non-business promoters (81% of supporters, weighted by the number of projects, say that they would not carry out the project in the absence of the ESI Funds), and it's also crucial for businesses, where this weight is reduced to 57%.

In the case of non-business promoters, this additionality effect is transversal. Still, some of the support typologies for R&D&I (Axis 1), competitiveness and internationalisation (Axis 2), resource sustainability/energy efficiency (Axis 6) and sustainability of territories (Axis 7) stand out. In the case of business promoters, the additionality effect of the ESIF is revealed above all in areas where there are traditionally market failures, such as business R&D (including CRII typologies) and also in the hiring of highly qualified human resources and the qualification and innovation of SMEs (CRII).

The OP has, on average, an investment leverage of €1.73, meaning that for each euro of funds financed by the OP, €0.73 of investment is additionally mobilised by the promoters. The leverage effect is higher in interventions funded by the ERDF (€1.85, compared to €1.20 in the ESF) and in the field of business investment in innovation of non-SMEs (€4.44), followed by the internationalisation of SMEs (€2.76).

Internal and external relevance/coherence

There is a high coherence of the OP Centro 2020 with the policy mix associated with its main intervention pillars and the territorial and sectoral context existing at the time, mainly as a result of the preparation of important sectoral/regional framework references (such as the Regional Strategy for Smart Specialisation, the Regional Action Plan - Centro 2014-2020, or the PNAEE and ECO: AP (in the energy efficiency dimension) and critical partners' consultation in the programming process.

In some themes, sectoral planning instruments, which set out objectives, priorities and critical operations for their pursuit, were essential to ensure alignment between TOs and SOs and the potential demand. The early preparation of the regional strategic reference frameworks, supported by solid and updated diagnostics, was also fundamental for the various key dimensions of the programming exercise. In addition, the definition of the framing planning instruments at the local/sub-regional level (PDCT, PEDU, PARU,...) was not only positive in promoting the effectiveness of operations. Still, it was also educational (it forced agents to plan their operations and dialogue to justify their options).

The programme architecture of the Operational Programme corresponds globally to the region's development needs but does not always meet the needs and expectations of regional and local actors. Some specific situations were signalled in which key actors were not involved or questioned about their needs, which conditioned the demand and investment intentions at the level of business representatives. The process of structuring the dimensions associated with energy efficiency and the use of renewable energies also had a minimal involvement of the MA of the OP Centro in the programming phase, which did not allow for anticipating many of the constraints and difficulties of operationalising this dimension. In the case of the rehabilitation and modernisation of the school park, several changes and inconsistencies were identified throughout the programming period and difficulties in accommodating the necessary financial amounts because of the numerous existing weaknesses and needs.

The coordinating and mobilising role of the OP MA was significant in the programming phase, acting as a partner with territorial actors, facilitating intersectoral coordination and helping to promote a structured dialogue between various vital actors. Generally, the Intermunicipal Communities/beneficiaries and the OP MA have a fruitful working relationship and consultation. Nevertheless, it is crucial to continue to improve articulation and promote more significant alignment and timely consultation (e.g., MA/CIM) to continue to create the conditions for greater institutional trust.

The reprogramming exercises responded positively and adequately to several contextual changes, mainly because of the severe impact of natural events (forest fires) and public health (pandemic) on the Region.

The complementarity between ESIF instruments and between these and other public policy instruments has not been very effective. However, there are generally no overlaps or competing effects between support instruments. Less than 1/3 of the promoters recognise that they have articulated the financing of the OP Centro 2014-2020 with other financial instruments (an essential part of the promoters assume that they are unaware of different national and Community support and financing tools or of other promoters). In the specific case of IFRRU2020, the insufficient results are mainly due to the competitive effects of other sectoral policy instruments, with repercussions on the mobilisation of demand.

4. Recommendations

Recommendations for the period 2014-2020	
Recommendation	Operationalisation
<p>R1. Ensure proactive monitoring of the final implementation of the OP Centro 2014-2020 by creating mobilisation and implementation dynamics that promote full absorption of funds with high levels of impact.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intensify communication actions to mobilise stakeholders to complete the implementation of the Programme, raising awareness among strategic stakeholders. • Intensify the processes of monitoring the implementation of operations and the articulated management of the Programme involving the Intermediate Bodies. • Establish dynamic communication mechanisms with beneficiaries, keeping them informed on a very regular basis about the implementation and closure of the Programme. • In the framework of the final reprogramming of the Programme, reinforce the allocation of funding to Investment Priorities and mechanisms with high impact and higher implementation capacity. • Release resources allocated to Investment Priorities that do not show the capacity to implement the allocated appropriations, namely those whose performance has been most affected by factors exogenous to the Programme and which register in the final phase financial allocations disproportionate to the dynamics of demand.
<p>R2. Evaluate ex-post the impacts of the Centro Regional Operational Programme 2014-2020 and promote communication actions to disseminate the results achieved and good practices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an impact assessment study of the Regional Operational Programme for the Centro 2014-2020, after 2025, to update this assessment and highlight the impacts effectively achieved by the Programme and the durability of the results over time. • Create a pool of operations supported by the Centro Regional Operational Programme 2014-2020 subject to follow-up and ex-post monitoring, allowing to measure and evidence of the Programme's impacts. • Design and implement an ex-post communication strategy of the Programme, which gives visibility to the results of the Programme and the importance of the ESI Funds in developing the Centro Region.

Recommendations for the period 2021-2027	
Recommendations for the Centro + Competitive	
Recommendation	Operationalisation
<p>R3. Consider approaches to launching Calls for Tenders, in particular, aimed at</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek to establish integrated business support agendas/programmes, starting, for example, from a framework and, above all, strategic Call for Tenders, which encourages companies, individually and jointly, to establish

Recommendations for the period 2021-2027	
Recommendations for the Centro + Competitive	
Recommendation	Operationalisation
<p>companies which provide greater predictability and foster the articulation between instruments (Pacts / Agendas for Business Transformation).</p>	<p>business transformation agendas and which presupposes planning of the different activities and investments to be carried out.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan and disseminate a calendar for the launch of calls for proposals for the different instruments to be mobilised (from support for business R&D, for example, to design a new product, to productive innovation that enables the production of the innovations developed and, finally, to internationalisation for the cross-border sale of new products). • Involve different strategic actors (companies, business associations, incubators, entities of the Regional Scientific and Technological System, clusters, territorial agents, in particular, linked to the valorisation of endogenous resources, etc.) in the discussion of these agendas, enhancing knowledge sharing and collaboration in the development and implementation of agendas. • Consider launching rolling notices where appropriate.
<p>R4. Continue to support the recruitment of highly qualified human resources, valuing their allocation to R&D&I activities and bringing businesses and academia closer.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the continuity of support for the hiring of Highly Qualified Human Resources in the Centro Region, maintaining the contribution of the Programme to the positive trajectory of qualification of regional employment. • Introduce positive discrimination measures (e.g., merit criteria, top-up in funding, others that may be relevant), whenever Highly Qualified Human Resources are to be integrated in research and development or innovation activities (product, production processes, etc.) and particularly when involved in TVC activities. • In line with the previous point, ensure that the applications present a plan for the insertion/career of Highly Qualified Human Resources that goes beyond the period of support, ensuring their allocation to high-added value activities, preferably in R&D&I and favourable conditions for their consolidation or even progression in the company. • Vigorously publicise and disseminate these supports, sharing success stories within the Academy and involving business representatives and incubators (e.g., Highly Qualified Human Resources hired from potential candidates currently in the Academy, companies that have used the support among their peers).
<p>R5. Stimulate business R&D, enhancing regional technology-based competitiveness and promoting the creation of highly qualified jobs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support innovation and collaboration entities/platforms, promoting the articulation between the actors of the Regional Innovation System and between them and companies, and valorising their role as agents that stimulate R&D&I and knowledge transfer, boosting the demand for collaborative projects and TVC. • Introduce stimuli for creating strategic R&D programmes targeting businesses to fund research agendas and plan the pipeline of R&D projects in the medium term and partnerships with other actors in the innovation system, especially targeting the Centro Region's economic specialisation domains. • Encourage the involvement of business associations in research agendas and consider their eligibility for support as a way of mobilising a business community less inclined to invest in this area. • Encourage the articulation between EEC PROVERE and business R&D considering the support to complementary projects to EEC PROVERE aimed at territorial innovation, involving the leading entities of collective efficiency strategies.

Recommendations for the period 2021-2027	
Recommendations for the Centro + Competitive	
Recommendation	Operationalisation
<p>R6. Stimulate the internationalisation of the regional business fabric, favouring collective actions that increase scale and critical mass.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resuming the commitment to strengthening internationalisation through incentive systems, whether in support of individual or joint projects or through collective actions. • Reinforce, in particular, the dynamization of collective actions to disseminate successful cases in the internationalisation of groups of companies/clusters (e.g., pyrotechnics, cheeses) and intensify/replicate dynamics aimed at gains in scale and the creation of joint brands, among others. • Involve business associations, clusters and other relevant actors to define appropriate approaches to this collective strategy.
<p>R7. Stimulate the use of Financial Instruments by promoting their knowledge, facilitating their use and enhancing their usefulness.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the dissemination of information on Financial Instruments to potential demand (companies), enhancing awareness and perception of the advantages of these instruments, especially in the context of rising interest rates. Consider both aspects of FI: capital (more geared towards companies with high growth and innovation potential and for the promotion of technology-based entrepreneurship) and debt (for individuals and companies, in this case as a complement to eligibilities that do not fit into the Incentive Systems, namely modernisation projects without the innovative character required by the Incentive Systems). • Reassess the procedural constraints associated with the mobilisation of Financial Instruments (debt and equity) by enterprises and introduce more significant simplification in the conditions of access to them to promote greater adherence and rapid execution by final beneficiaries. • Promote the involvement of financial intermediaries in the operationalisation of these instruments in conjunction with the Banco Português de Fomento.

Recommendations for the period 2021-2027	
Recommendations for the Centro + Social and Inclusive	
Recommendation	Operationalisation
<p>R8. Keep the focus on measures to support micro-entrepreneurship and employability, rationalising their scope and integrating objectives of scale and competitiveness.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the continuity of support for micro-entrepreneurship and support for employability, including the creation of one's job, given the recognised success and scope of support and the capacity to intervene in a wide range of businesses. • Apply, carefully and without distorting the nature of the instrument, more restrictive rules for access to support (e.g., by limiting eligible operations or expenses, making applications subject to the presentation of business qualification and expansion plans) to reduce the excessively high number of applications, to minimise selectivity rates, but above all, to avoid the loss of opportunity of projects due to analysis times. • Promote the articulation between instruments to favour a trajectory, whenever applicable, of growth, consolidation and internationalisation of the companies supported in this area, as well as the articulation with measures to strengthen qualifications and skills (e.g., alignment of the offer and support for Technological Specialisation Courses, complemented with efforts to encourage capability, internationalisation and innovation in Small and Medium Enterprises).

Recommendations for the period 2021-2027	
Recommendations for the Centro + Social and Inclusive	
Recommendation	Operationalisation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combine support with more comprehensive measures that induce the attraction and settlement of population and companies in the Centro Region, for which the determining factors of the choices of citizens and companies must be assessed and measures defined that adequately respond to the challenges of cohesion and territorial competitiveness identified.
<p>R9. Maintain the commitment to promote access to services of general interest through investment in health, education and social equipment networks, strengthening inter-municipal network responses and generating innovative forms of provision</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out the prospective analysis of equipment needs (health, social and education) or interventions in them, to be carried out within the scope of the various regional sectoral planning instruments (Educational Charters, Social Charters and Health Charters, at local or inter-municipal level) to guarantee an effective and prioritised response to the needs of the Centro Region. • Encourage the creation of inter-municipal projects to respond to the social, education and health areas, increasing the efficiency of investment, strengthening functional regions and overcoming the problems generated by population loss and lack of critical mass. • Encourage the emergence of innovative forms of provision, in particular of general services of social interest, in conjunction with deepening the digitalisation of the public and social sectors, boosting training actions, dissemination of success stories and financial incentives for innovative initiatives.
<p>R10. Enhance the attractiveness, appropriateness and dissemination of vocational training and lifelong learning provision by simplifying procedures.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote awareness of the importance of training and lifelong learning by disseminating the results and benefits of human capital training to the beneficiary groups (entrepreneurs, workers, unemployed,...). This awareness-raising should mobilise appropriate forms of communication for each target group and be articulated with the social partners. • Encourage the consolidation of the training offer and alignment with the needs of the productive fabric of the Centro Region and socio-economic profile (qualification of the active population, ageing population, immigration flows). Reinforce the focus on initial training and create responses aligned with the problems of the most disadvantaged groups, providing for the combination with social support. • Consider reviewing the application of the <i>de minimis</i> regime to modalities that have traditionally been in low demand and need to be stimulated to allow companies not to be limited in participating in training modalities when inserted in business development projects supported by the ESI Funds. • Simplify the application processes for business investment projects, including submitting payment claims for the training component. • Consider attractive bonuses for business projects with a training component, as well as incentives for investment in training during working hours. • Articulate the instruments to support labour market insertion with support for training (pay particular attention to the case of Technological Specialisation Courses, favouring the hiring of effectively graduated candidates in internships, but also to CTeSP, taking advantage of the exceptional adherence verified and to ensure the fixation of workers with this level of qualification in the Region). • Facilitate new approaches and formats for training courses that mitigate drop-out risks for entering/re-entering the labour market, such as online training (synchronous and asynchronous).

Recommendations for the period 2021-2027	
Recommendations for the Centro + Social and Inclusive	
Recommendation	Operationalisation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider approaches to attract trainees from student and immigrant source markets, to enter training offers available in the Centro Region and, subsequently, the labour market.

Recommendations for the period 2021-2027	
Recommendations for the Centro + Green	
Recommendation	Operationalisation
<p>R11. Strengthen the attractiveness of energy efficiency incentives by reinforcing the Region's commitment to European and national carbon neutrality targets.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the introduction of mechanisms aimed at improving the efficiency of support for the energy efficiency of companies, providing for the possibility of focusing on the contracting of energy performance improvement services (the entities providing these services - energy service companies - being the beneficiaries of the support and the companies of the Centro Region the final recipients). This option should provide for the monitoring and evaluation operations measured in the reduction of energy consumption generated. • Evaluate the possibility (and possibly negotiate with the European Commission) of making eligibility more flexible to allow the financing of activities/supplies necessary for the implementation of projects (possibly with some limit on the overall calculation of the approved incentive) and to allow non-refundable / non-repayable support with a differentiated support rate. • Stabilise the methodologies for analysing applications for these supports and adopt measures to promote the speed of these procedures. • Adopt measures to accelerate opinions required from Intermediate Bodies and to speed up decisions on applications or amendments to projects, as well as advances/reimbursements to promoters. • Prioritise energy performance contracts to ensure better performance and reduce business risk. • Broaden the range of eligibilities, particularly concerning the target sources of support (production for self-consumption), providing support for photovoltaic energy investments, considering the small size of the business fabric and the very favourable resources of the Central Region in this particular renewable energy source, considering the end of the ceilings adopted in the 2014-2020 period. • Develop communication and awareness-raising actions to highlight the positive effects of investment in energy efficiency actions (in particular, the energy savings associated - in the short, medium, and long term - with both process improvement and the use of alternative sources) in the business, residential and local government sectors.

Recommendations for the period 2021-2027	
Recommendations for the Centro + Cohesive and + Close to Citizens	
Recommendation	Operationalisation
R12. Strengthen and adapt investments in urban development to increase the attractiveness of urban areas, differentiating the forms of investment according to the size of urban centres and recognising the multiple scales of urban policy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiate the types of eligibility of the different kinds of urban centres, recognising and intensifying the role of regional urban centres in competitiveness, establishing qualified human capital and developing R+D+I through strengthening technological infrastructures and equipment aligned with RIS3. • Strengthen urban qualification through investments defined and implemented at the appropriate scale: the scale of the functional Region, described in the CIM ITI and promoting the strengthening of local urban subsystems; the scale of the urban centre that increases the capacity for urban management and coordination, through solutions for territorial intelligence, climate adaptation, circularity and sustainable mobility; neighbourhood scale, continuing the regeneration processes of degraded areas and promoting the inclusion of disadvantaged communities. • Intensify the capacity-building mechanisms of municipalities and Intermunicipal Communities, preparing them to design a new generation of investments that contribute to the transformative change of urban spaces, aligned with the New European Bauhaus Initiative (NEB) guidelines.
R13. Intensify the capacity-building processes of the ecosystem of funds, especially territorial actors, for the new challenges of energy, ecological and digital transition, through specific actions and the creation of networks (formal and informal) for strategic and operational reflection, training and operationalisation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and densify formal and informal regional and inter-municipal networks to identify everyday needs and opportunities, to consider, reflect, debate and define strategic and transversal projects of interest to the various Intermunicipal Communities or to share/think about solutions to overcome common difficulties (e.g., in the operationalisation of the contracting process). • Densify the capacity building/training processes for elected representatives and human resources in the Municipalities and Intermunicipal Communities, as well as strengthen internal technical staff, in a context for enhancing specific competencies and attributions in the management of central areas for the 2021-2027 contracting process (new competences/responsibilities require more qualified resources). • Strengthen partnerships between the Intermunicipal Communities and critical regional actors for specialised support in some strategic priority areas.
R14. Intensify the link between valorising and preserving natural and cultural heritage and structuring sub-regional and regional tourism products.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within the scope of the definition of the IMC-ITI make the financing of unique projects for preserving natural and cultural heritage conditional on their integration into strategies for structuring regional sub-regional tourism products. • Design support instruments and boost capacity-building actions that provide Intermunicipal Communities / Municipalities with technical skills to support the design and structuring of tourism products. • Define financing instruments and design strategic programmes for promoting sub-regional tourism products created with the support of the ESI Funds.

Recommendations for the <i>post-2030</i> period	
Recommendation	Operationalisation
R15. Redefine the financing mechanisms for regional policy post-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement other programmatic mechanisms for financing regional development policy, namely regional development contracts established with CCDR, CIM and other regional actors, complementary to the Regional

Recommendations for the <i>post-2030</i> period	
Recommendation	Operationalisation
<p>2030, responding to the possible reduction in Cohesion Policy funding, the increasing ineligibility of local investment needs and the financing challenges of decentralisation in the medium term.</p>	<p>Programme, supported exclusively by national funds and other development support mechanisms (e.g., EIB) that allow:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Safeguard the expected reduction in Cohesion Policy funding after 2029; ○ finance local and regional investment needs not eligible under Cohesion Policy, in particular of an infrastructural nature such as the construction and maintenance of equipment, accessibility or environmental infrastructure; ○ finance regional and municipal investments resulting from the deepening of decentralisation; ○ ensure fiscal predictability and results-orientation of public investment; ○ finance the full implementation of PROT Centro in its various dimensions.
<p>R16. Ensure that the post-2030 fund programming period is supported by the realisation of regional and inter-municipal strategic planning exercises involving local and regional stakeholders.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiate regional and sub-regional strategic territorial planning processes that define, upstream of the programming and contracting process, the regional and inter-municipal development visions recommended for each territory according to its specific needs and opportunities. • Ensure that strategic planning processes are proper processes of capacity building, empowerment, reflection and participation by drawing up a methodological guide for their realisation in advance and making their funding conditional on the fulfilment of a previously defined methodological process, where the various phases of involvement, participation and communication are foreseen. • Design and implement in advance a strategic planning capacity building programme for the Capacity Building Communities to support the preparation and conduct of the planning exercises. • Establish mechanisms for communication, publicising and disseminating regional and sub-regional strategies.

Mid-term evaluation of the Centro 2020 Regional Operational Programme

Executive Summary

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